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HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Extension up to 31 December 1996 of the provisions of paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 49/222 B

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Good management considerations prompt the Secretary-General to inform the General Assembly of certain consequences that may result from the full implementation of resolution 49/222 B of 20 July 1995 as of the opening of the fifty-first session. By that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to develop a comprehensive policy on the use of retirees and to report thereon at its fifty-first session. It decided that, pending consideration of the policy, no former staff member who was in receipt of a pension benefit from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund should receive from any United Nations funds more than 12,000 United States dollars in total in any calendar year. The Assembly authorized during the fiftieth session a derogation from the decision with a view to maintaining the maximum effectiveness of conference services.

2. A report on this matter is currently in preparation and will be issued by early summer for review by the General Assembly at some point during its fifty-first session. However, under the terms of resolution 49/222 B, the derogation granted for conference servicing staff lapses with the opening of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly in mid-September. Unless action is taken by the Assembly during the resumed fiftieth session to extend that derogation through the fifty-first session, the enforcement of the $12,000 limit is likely to have a serious impact on the conference services provided to the fifty-first session in terms of both cost and availability.

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II. BACKGROUND

3. As often stated in programme budget documents, the permanent staff resources of conference services are programmed below the levels required for the projected workloads and are augmented when necessary through the use of temporary staff, for which provision is made under temporary assistance for meetings. The combination of increased workloads and reduced staff resources, however, has led to a situation where, in many areas, established staffing levels do not even meet the requirements of low workload periods. The consequence has been a heavy reliance on temporary assistance and substantial expenditures under this item. One way to limit these expenditures has been to call, to the maximum extent possible, on the local freelance market for language staff, which, especially in New York, consists mostly of United Nations retirees. Once the resources available in the very limited local market are exceeded, all temporary staff are recruited non-locally at a much higher cost, which includes reimbursement of travel expenses and payment of a daily subsistence allowance (DSA) in addition to salary.

III. ANTICIPATED COST/AVAILABILITY IMPACT OF ENFORCING THE $12,000 LIMIT IN CONFERENCE SERVICES

4. Even assuming they have not worked for the Organization in 1996 prior to the opening of the fifty-first session, retirees recruited locally would not be able to cover the entire three-month session while remaining within the $12,000 limit. Thus, local retirees would have to be replaced in many cases by non-local recruits at some point during the session. Similarly, the $12,000 limit would preclude non-local retirees from servicing the General Assembly for three months. The servicing of the session would have to be divided between two shifts, thus doubling travel expenses and entailing additional DSA costs (the DSA rate is reduced after 60 days).

5. The specific situation for the various services concerned can be described as follows.

6. In interpretation, if a local interpreter is replaced by a non-local, the additional cost involves not only travel and per diem but a daily remuneration rate that is higher than the local rate. If the session has to be divided between two non-local retirees, there will be additional travel and per diem cost. In certain language combinations, retirees may have exceeded the limit before the Assembly begins and it may be impossible to find alternative staff. On the basis of 1995 figures, it has been calculated that the replacement of local retirees by non-local freelance staff will increase the cost of services by more than $160,000 for the duration of the General Assembly session, not counting travel expenses, which vary from one individual to another.

7. In translation, most, or in the case of some languages, all local freelancers are retirees. Many will have reached the $12,000 limit by the time the Assembly session starts since, as indicated above, temporary assistance is now required during periods other than workload peaks such as the General Assembly session. It is estimated that for each local staff replaced by non-local staff, an extra cost of some $14,000 in DSA and travel expenses will

be incurred. Moreover, retirees are mostly experienced senior staff whose work does not need to be revised. To replace them with less proficient translators, which would be the only alternative, would also entail a substantial loss in productivity. These considerations apply equally to translators and editors.

8. Also, it should be borne in mind that many retired translators/revisers are doing translation work for the United Nations contractually, outside the periods during which they may receive an assignment as a freelancer. Since contractual translation, which has been shown to be the most cost-effective mode of translation, is used more and more extensively, United Nations retirees will, in some cases, get close to reaching the $12,000 limit before the session of the General Assembly begins.

9. With regard to verbatim records, an added difficulty stems from the fact that verbatim reporting in six official languages is unique to the United Nations. For Russian and Chinese, properly trained reporters are seconded from service with their Governments for the duration of the General Assembly session, but for the other four languages, retirees are the main source of temporary assistance. The alternative option of training non-United Nations staff is not practical, as the main employment opportunity, if not the only one, for most of the newly trained individuals would be for only two and a half months at the time of the autumn session of the General Assembly. A few local retirees are recruited on a "when actually employed" basis during the remainder of the year for the servicing of the Security Council. The aggregate earnings of those local retirees would reach the $12,000 ceiling well before the end of the Assembly session. Under these circumstances, the Organization might find itself in a situation where the services of temporary verbatim reporters might simply no longer be available on the local or non-local market.

10. There would also be an impact on the operation of conference services at Geneva and Vienna, particularly translation, which will be detailed in the full report to be submitted later; but the major impact would be felt during the General Assembly session in New York.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

11. Under these circumstances, it is recommended that the temporary derogation granted to conference servicing staff be extended up to 31 December 1996.